United Nations E/AC.51/2002/4

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
9 April 2002

Original: English

Committee for Programme and Coordination
Forty-second session
10 June-5 July 2002
Item 4 (c) of the provisional agenda*
Programme questions: evaluation

In-depth evaluation of the subprogrammes on General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and Economic and Social Council support and coordination

Note by the Secretary-General**

In conformity with General Assembly resolutions 48/218 B of 29 July 1994 and 54/244 of 23 December 1999, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit herewith the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the in-depth evaluation of the subprogrammes on General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and Economic and Social Council support and coordination. The report has been reviewed by the relevant departments and offices. The Secretary-General takes note of its findings and concurs with its recommendations.

* E/AC.51/2002/1.

** The delay in the submission of the present document was a result of lengthy internal consultations.

02-32756 (E) 070502

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the in-depth evaluation of the subprogrammes on General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs and Economic and Social Council support and coordination

Summary

The present report focuses on the substantive and technical secretariat support to intergovernmental bodies primarily in the economic and social areas. The first part of the report reviews the work of subprogramme 28.1, Economic and Social Council support and coordination, of the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001, as revised (A/53/6/Rev.1) which provides substantive secretariat support. It is implemented by the Division for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The second part of the report reviews the work of subprogramme 27.1, General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs, which provides technical secretariat support. It is implemented by the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council Affairs Division of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services.

The objectives of the Division for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination include the following: (a) assist and support the intergovernmental decision-making process in the Economic and Social Council and the Second Committee of the General Assembly; (b) facilitate and promote greater cooperation and collaboration among organizations of the United Nations system in the economic and social areas; (c) promote and strengthen coherence and reform within the United Nations system in the area of operational activities for development; and (d) mobilize non-governmental organizations to participate in the work of the Council.

The Division has achieved most of its objectives during the period under consideration. In partnership with the Bureau of the Council, the Division's work has contributed to the marked improvement in the functioning of the Council. The Division recommended many actions to be taken by Governments, intergovernmental bodies, organizations of the United Nations system and civil society that were incorporated into final decisions of the Council. It provided, as well, requested assistance in the negotiation process. The Division also facilitated innovation in the work of the Council through the introduction of panels of eminent persons and by holding a joint meeting between the Council and the Bretton Woods institutions. There was an increase in the number and level of government participants in the high-level segment as well as an increase in the number and level of participants from the United Nations system in the work of the Council. The Division has also been largely successful in performing its function of acting as a bridge between the Council and the funds and programmes on operational issues, and has initiated an outreach programme on the work of the Council. In mobilizing non-governmental organizations to participate in the work of the Council, the Division worked to enhance the efficiency of the non-governmental organization review process by increasing the quality of the applications; developed training workshops, which were presented in the regions and at major conferences; promoted regional networks to strengthen communication and coordination among non-governmental organizations;

and achieved greater balance in the representation of organizations from developing countries.

While the evaluation did not find significant shortcomings in the support provided by the Division to the Council, it identified the following issues: (a) the preparatory process could be made more effective through a more systematic use of panels, round tables and seminars, especially in advance of the session, if outcome documents were adopted by the joint meetings with the Bretton Woods institutions and if the functional commissions were to make a specific input to the Council's annual themes; (b) there is a need to involve delegations from Geneva in the preparatory process when sessions are to be held at Geneva; (c) the planning of themes for the various segments could benefit from a multi-year perspective; (d) the work of the Council should be made more visible by focusing the web site on the issues before it; and (e) it was also noted that the backlog of applications from non-governmental organizations awaiting processing by the Division had increased over the past four years along with the proportion of applications deferred.

Recommendations are made: (a) to make the preparatory process for the segments of the Council more deliberative and reflective; (b) to introduce longer-term planning in the work of the Council and to establish better linkages with the functional commissions; (c) to produce a greater percentage of Council documents on time; (d) to make the role of the Division as a bridge between the General Assembly and the Council on operational issues more effective; (e) to reconsider the scheduling of the meetings of the segments of the Council; (f) to make the work of the Council more visible and accessible by revamping the web site; and (g) to develop strategies to reduce the backlog of non-governmental organization applications.

The second part of the report reviews the technical secretariat support given by the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council Affairs Division of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services. This Division was established in 1997 in the context of the Secretary-General's management reform measures to combine entities that were previously located in the Department of Political Affairs and the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development. The Division's main objectives are: (a) to provide technical secretariat services to the General Assembly, its Main Committees (First to Fourth), its subsidiary and ad hoc bodies and the Council and its subsidiary bodies headquartered in New York, including authoritative procedural advice; and (b) to coordinate the timely preparation of pre-session documentation and to prepare in-session documentation in all official languages for the above-mentioned intergovernmental bodies.

The Division has performed efficiently and effectively in providing technical secretariat services to intergovernmental bodies during a period of organizational transition, which necessarily included physical relocation and changes in staff members' roles and responsibilities. Recent General Assembly resolutions calling for streamlining and revitalizing the work of the Assembly and its Main Committees have created not only new demands but also new challenges for the Division. Generally, delegations have expressed satisfaction with the support provided by the Division, while at the same time suggesting ways for improving both the technical and substantive support provided by the Secretariat, with particular emphasis on the timely submission of documents. The Division has made a serious effort to improve the latter by creating a new documentation-monitoring unit, by holding regular

meetings with focal points in author departments and by presenting several proposals on improving departmental accountability to the Committee on Conferences. Despite these efforts, a significant proportion of General Assembly and Council documents are issued after the six-week deadline approved by the Assembly.

Recommendations are made: (a) to strengthen the provision of advice and support by technical and substantive secretariats; (b) to make more efficient use of meeting services; and (c) for the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services to prepare a multi-year management plan to reduce delays in documentation when the causes are within the control of the Secretariat.

Contents

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	Introduction	1	6
	Part one Economic and Social Council support and coordination	2-57	6
II.	Background	2–4	6
III.	Assisting the process of intergovernmental decision-making	5–31	7
	A. Facilitate intergovernmental agreements	6–14	7
	B. Facilitate innovation and encourage high-level participation in sessions	15–23	9
	C. Quality and timeliness of outputs	24–28	11
	D. Encourage input and follow-up by the functional commissions and other subsidiary bodies	29–31	12
IV.	Participation of the organizations of the United Nations system in the work of the Council	32–34	13
V.	Common policy and procedural structure for operational activities	35–38	14
VI.	Mobilization of non-governmental organizations to participate in the work of the Council	39–49	15
	A. Increased workload and backlog	41–45	16
	B. Enhancing representation and participation of non-governmental organizations	46–49	17
VII.	Conclusions and recommendations	50–57	19
	Part two General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs	58–85	23
VIII.	Background	58–60	23
IX.	Provision of technical secretariat services	61–74	24
	A. Support to the plenary and the Second and Third Committees of the General Assembly	63–70	24
	B. Support of the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies	71–73	27
	C. Utilization of conference servicing resources by the plenary and Main Committees of the General Assembly	74	27
X.	Timely submission of parliamentary documentation	75–81	29
	A. Improvements in monitoring and accountability	77–79	29
	B. Other proposals by the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services for improving timeliness	80–81	31
XI.	Conclusions and recommendations	82–85	31

I. Introduction

1. As recommended by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its fortieth session,[1] the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an in-depth evaluation of subprogramme 28.1, Economic and Social Council support and coordination of the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001, as revised,[2] implemented by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and subprogramme 27.1, General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs, implemented by the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services. The present report focuses primarily on the secretariat support provided to established intergovernmental bodies in the economic and social areas and covers the period from 1998 to 2001, that is, the span of one medium-term plan. Part one of the report contains an assessment of the substantive support provided to the Council by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, while part two contains an assessment of the technical secretariat support provided by the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services in the economic and social areas. Standard procedures for the in-depth evaluation were followed: (a) initial consultations with the department and offices; (b) collection of United Nations documents and reports, and other existing assessments; (c) structured interviews and consultations with staff members of the two Divisions, current and former members of the office of the President of the General Assembly, former members of the bureaux of the Economic and Social Council, the Second, Third and Fourth Committees of the General Assembly, representatives on the Committee on Conferences and the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations; (d) systematic content analysis of Council documents and resolutions; and (e) examination of summary records and composition of panels of the Council. The findings and recommendations of a February 2001 OIOS inspection on the consolidation of technical support services in the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services (A/55/803) have been taken into account and updated information with respect to implementation is provided.

Part one
Evaluation of Economic and Social Council support and coordination

II. Background

2. The goal of subprogramme 28.1, Economic and Social Council support and coordination, which is implemented by the Division for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination, is to strengthen the policy management and coordinating roles of the Economic and Social Council as well as enable the Council to better fulfil its role in the policy dialogue on macroeconomic issues.[3]

3. As the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001 did not specify performance measures, OIOS consulted the programme managers and adapted the performance measures in the approved medium-term plan for 2002-2005[4] to the previous period.

4. Until 1997, the subprogramme was implemented by the Division for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination in the Department for Policy

Coordination and Sustainable Development. With the establishment of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs in 1998, the new Division for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination is implementing the programme. Its responsibilities were essentially unchanged, except for the transfer to the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services of the function of technical secretariat of the Council and the Second and Third Committees of the General Assembly. The Division consists of three branches: Policy Coordination, Interorganization Cooperation and Development Cooperation Policy. During 2000-2001 the Division had a budget of $8.8 million and an establishment of 46 posts.

III. Assisting the process of intergovernmental decision-making

5. The approved first objective of the subprogramme in the medium-term plan for 1998-2001 is to develop proposals and provide support to central intergovernmental bodies for the integrated and coordinated policy responses to issues of development and to emerging global problems in the economic and social fields (para. 28.6 (a)).

A. Facilitate intergovernmental agreements

6. In order to facilitate intergovernmental agreements, the Division for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination prepares reports, organizes panels and round tables, encourages participation by senior officials of the organizations of the United Nations system and provides assistance, on request, during the process of negotiating resolutions, agreed conclusions and ministerial declarations. It also coordinates the preparation and presentation to the Council's general segment of reports of organizations of the United Nations system.

7. Members of current and past bureaux of the Council indicated that the support provided by the Division was very helpful in reaching agreements. The support mentioned included facilitation of the preparation of drafts that would serve as the basis for ministerial declarations, elements for resolutions and general support in ensuring that decisions adopted were consistent with past practice and realistic in the context of the United Nations system.

8. The measure of performance for this activity is the proportion of recommendations in the reports prepared by the Division that are included in the outcome documents that are adopted by the Council. During the five-year period, an average 28 per cent of the recommendations made by the Division were included in the agreed text. As shown in table 1, there was greater utilization of recommendations in the coordination segments and the high-level segments of 1998 and 2001. *The operational activities segments in those years, when the triennial comprehensive policy review was scheduled in the General Assembly, were mainly contributing to the review process by providing views and comments to the analytical reports of the Division to be used in the formulation of policy recommendations for the report to the General Assembly.** The common factor in these segments was the use of panels (involving a presentation by a group of eminent persons, *government representatives and United Nations country teams* followed by a discussion with the Council) and briefings in advance of the session

* The text shown in italics represents the comments of management on the present report.

(coordination, operational and high-level segments) and during the session (high-level segment). A smaller proportion of the recommendations were adopted in: (a) the high-level segment of 1999 on the role of employment and work in poverty eradication: the empowerment and advancement of women; and (b) the coordination segment of 2000 (on assessment of the progress made in the promotion of an integrated and coordinated implementation of and follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits). For the high-level segment of 1999, owing to the scarcity of related, empirically based research within the Secretariat, the preparation of the theme report was assigned to another agency (International Labour Organization), and not to the Division, as is generally the case. For the coordination segment of 2000, the scheduling of the theme, so close to several of the five-year reviews in 1999 and 2000, may not have provided sufficient span for an assessment.

Table 1
Percentage of recommendations made by the Division for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination adopted by the Council

Segment	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
High-level	32.0	50.0	4.8	20.0	40.0
Operational	-	n.a.[a]	27.0	11.8	n.a.
Coordination	16.7	62.8	n.a.	22.2	77.8
General	50.0	11.0	20.8	33.3	20.0
Average	**24.7**	**41.3**	**17.5**	**21.8**	**45.9**

[a] During the years of the triennial comprehensive policy review, the report to the Council on operational activities does not contain recommendations.

9. Since 1997 the Secretariat has made recommendations on the themes for the high-level and coordination segment (see E/1997/92, E/1998/96, E/1999/91, E/2000/65 and E/2001/53). To develop the recommendations, the Secretariat requests suggestions from Member States and organizations of the United Nations system and reviews recommendations made by other intergovernmental bodies, including the General Assembly, whose resolutions occasionally contain suggestions directed to the Economic and Social Council. The recommendations about a given year's themes are acted on by the Council during the substantive session of the previous year. The selection of themes for the various segments has often been difficult, with the Council not always able to reach a decision by the end of the substantive session. When this has occurred, it was more difficult for the Division to articulate and prepare the themes adequately. It should also be noted that the criteria that are supposed to be used by the Division in recommending themes to the Council have not been established precisely.

10. The measure of performance is the extent to which the themes of the high-level and coordination segment *are adopted by the Council usually at the end of the preceding session.* In the case of high-level segment themes, the recommendations made by the Secretariat were adopted by the Council for 1999 and 2001 *at the end of sessions held in New York*, but were not adopted for 1998, 2000 or 2002 *at the end of sessions held in Geneva.* This variation may be attributed to changes in the composition of delegations, which are based on venue, and which, in turn, may have

affected the ability of the Secretariat to communicate with the delegations participating in the Geneva session.

11. With respect to the coordination segment themes, the proposals of the Secretary-General were adopted in 1999 and partially in 2000, but were not adopted for 2001 and 2002. In the case of the themes for 2002, the Secretariat proposal for the high-level segment was adopted, mutatis mutandis, for the coordination segment. In 2001, one element of the Secretary-General's proposals (on partnerships) was incorporated into the theme, which was otherwise different.

12. The finding that there were qualitative differences in sessions held at Geneva and New York was noted by members of the Bureau of the Economic and Social Council as well as by officials of the Division. They noted that much of the substantive preparation for segments in the form of panels and briefings took place in New York, involving New York-based delegates. For smaller delegations, especially from developing countries, it was difficult for New York-based delegates to participate in meetings in Geneva. Many informal understandings reached in New York had to be re-negotiated in Geneva.

13. Based on an analysis of the recommendations made by the Council in their outcome documents, it was evident that while an effort was made by the Division for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination to prepare the substance well in advance, especially through expert group meetings and panel discussions that resulted in an outcome document, it led to conclusions and recommendations that were more substantive, detailed and forward-looking.

14. The role of the main reports of the Secretary-General for the high-level, coordination and operational activities segments was also clearly important. When they were prepared by the Division, they were more effective in framing the issue than when they were prepared by other organizational units. This was because the Division had a clearer view of the most appropriate way to present the material in a form that could be used by the Council or by the Second Committee of the General Assembly. When new ground was being covered, the importance of the report was particularly useful, as was the case with the theme of the high-level segment in 2000 on the role of information and communication technology. The utility of the reports can be enhanced if they are issued reasonably in advance of the session at which they are to be discussed. When this has happened, they have been taken into account when Member States formulate their positions.

B. Facilitate innovation and encourage high-level participation in sessions

15. During the period of the study, the use by the Economic and Social Council of panels and round tables increased, both during and prior to the substantive sessions. Many of these were suggested by the Division for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination in response to concerns of the Bureau. The objective of the panels was primarily to assist members of delegations to become familiar with the issues.

16. By 2001, the in-session panels of the Council were beginning to be seen as vehicles for developing follow-up to the decisions of the Council. An example was the organization of an African Forum for Investment Promotion as part of the high-

level segment. The Division prepared a discussion document for the Forum based on the issues raised in the preparations for the segment and included material for the conference on financing for development.

17. Over the period being evaluated, the number of participants in the high-level segment steadily increased, while the level of representation rose, as reported in the reports of the Council. There were four speakers in 1999, all heads or senior managers of United Nations organizations, and 93 speakers in 2001, more than half of them being high-level government officials — heads of State, ministers, vice-ministers and ambassadors. The sharp increase in high-level participation during the past two years can be attributed in part to the interactive structure of the sessions, which encourages Member States to send higher-ranking participants, as well as the growing importance of the Council as a forum for policy discussion. These have been encouraged and supported by the Division, working with the Bureau and with individual Member States.

18. The convening of a joint meeting between the Council and the Bretton Woods institutions was a major innovation during the period. Held immediately after the spring meeting of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as in the case of high-level segments, these meetings have also attracted participation at a senior level. The one-day meetings were originally conceived as a means for governmental representatives from different perspectives to be able to exchange information and thus influence the policy directions of their respective intergovernmental institutions. The process has evolved from presentation of statements to a more interactive event structured around round-tables, as in 2001.

19. The joint meetings do not have a formal outcome. At the first meeting in 1998, there was an effort to have a summary by the President of the Council but, in subsequent years, the only outcome document was an informal summary of discussions. The members of the Council's bureaux who were interviewed noted that this was a weakness of the process. There would either have to be a more extensive preparatory process or, alternatively, a post-meeting process to formulate the agreements. The discussion notes prepared were considered to be helpful in focusing the debate, at least for members of the Council.

20. In addition to preparing material to assist in the intergovernmental process, the Division is also responsible for codifying the resolutions and precedents that are being set by the Council's work, through input to the *Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs*. This publication has been developed as a means of guaranteeing an institutional memory.

21. Another innovation in 2001 was to prepare a document that included the results of panels and briefings, so that these results could feed into the process of preparing the reports of the Secretary-General and in beginning a process of informal consideration by Member States of the kinds of conclusions they could and should adopt at the end of the process. The same should apply for the results of the joint meetings with the Bretton Woods institutions, as it would allow that innovative procedure to have a more direct effect on the results of the Council's deliberations particularly if the discussions were focused on the theme to be taken up by the Council.

22. While the first objective of the medium-term plan did not refer to outreach, clearly an increased outreach has been one of the innovations that took place during

the medium-term plan period. In addition to maintaining a web page for the Council, which became an important means of making information about its work available, the Division has begun issuing publications containing the detailed material that formed the basis of the Council's high-level discussions in 2000 and 2001.

23. The web site is found at http://www.un.org/esa/coordination/ecosoc/. It is organized on the basis of formal structure rather than theme (for example, it has pages on the function of the Charter of the United Nations, the President, the Bureau, the membership, documents and the Secretariat). This makes it difficult to follow substantive topics and themes in the site. In terms of determining what the Council is doing, the site is not user-friendly. Furthermore, an evaluation of the use of the site to obtain copies of the documentation showed that it was easier to use the Official Document System of the United Nations (ODS) to obtain documents. Also, many of the pages in the part of the site dealing with the Division had not been updated for 10 months and contained outdated material (e.g., the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination has replaced the Administrative Committee for Coordination).

C. Quality and timeliness of outputs

24. A review of the extent to which the reports prepared by the Division are mentioned by delegations in their interventions in the discussion, as reflected in the summary records, shows that for a large number of delegations, the Secretariat's reports were of sufficient importance that they were cited to support the Governments' positions.[5]

25. As can be seen from table 2, up to a third of the statements made by delegations referred to Secretariat reports prepared by the Division to support their position. The reports submitted for the high-level segment in 2000 appeared to have been particularly important in framing the debate. The subject of that year's segment on information and communication technology was relatively new. Similarly, the reports prepared for the coordination segment have always been important for Governments. In terms of the operation segment, it should be noted that 1998 was the year of the triennial review of operational activities, and many Governments used the Secretariat's report in formulating their interventions.

Table 2
Percentage of governmental statements in the summary records of the Economic and Social Council mentioning the relevant reports of the Secretary-General, by segment and year

Segment	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
High-level	13	8	23
Operational	27	17	17
Coordination	31	33	26
Average	**23**	**19**	**22**

26. Interviews with members of the Bureau of the Council confirmed that the contribution of senior staff of the Division was also very helpful in framing and adopting decisions, especially in terms of providing the necessary institutional memory.

27. One of the issues that is related to the ability of intergovernmental bodies to reach decisions is whether the documents prepared by the Secretariat were issued on time. Based on the information presented in the reports to the Council on the status of documentation, it can be seen that, regarding timeliness, the best year was 1998 and the worst 2000 (table 3). It should be noted that 2000 was the year of the Millennium Assembly as well as two special sessions of the General Assembly that occurred prior to the Council's session. This delayed the preparation of documentation for all other meetings.

Table 3
Proportion of documents produced by the Division for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination by timeliness of issuance and year
(Percentages)

Timeliness of issuance	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Issued on time	46	7	14	21
Issued late but before session	46	43	7	50
Issued during session	8	50	79	29
Total number of documents	**13**	**14**	**14**	**14**

28. In some cases the documents were late because they reported on other meetings that had taken place near or after the documentation issuance deadlines. For example, in 2000, the keynote report on the theme for the high-level segment was based on a meeting of the high-level panel of experts on information and communication technology that took place in New York from 17 to 20 April 2000. In this case, although the report was issued late, the influence of the Division's report (see para. 25 above) can be attributed to delegations' participation in the April meeting. In other cases, the need to obtain comments and clearances from other organizations of the United Nations system required additional time.

D. Encourage input and follow-up by the functional commissions and other subsidiary bodies

29. One of the Council's functions is to ensure consistency between recommendations presented by the different functional commissions. The annual consolidated reports prepared since 1999 on the work of the functional commissions document the fact that the subsidiary bodies have taken action to follow up the discussions of the Council. For example, five of the eight subsidiary bodies included in the 2001 report (E/2001/95) undertook specific follow-up to the ministerial declaration on the role of information technology adopted by the Council in 2000.[6]

30. The Council session is at the apex of a series of sessions of functional commissions. There is little evidence, however, that the functional commissions

make formal contributions to the Council's discussion of crosscutting issues through resolutions or agreed texts.[7] This is due, in part, to the fact that most subsidiary bodies now work on the basis of multi-year work programmes that are decided well before the Council selects the themes for the segments in its next session.

31. The organization by the Secretariat of joint meetings of the bureaux of the functional commissions with the Bureau of the Council may help to strengthen the input of the functional commissions, if it leads to discussion of the issues with which the Council will be seized. There is evidence that this was beginning to take place in 2001. The Bureau of the Council held individual joint meetings with the bureaux of the functional commissions. The notes of the meetings show that bureau members requested and received input about the upcoming themes for the Council. However, this occurred too late for a formal input to be received from the commissions themselves. If it were possible for the Council to specify, in general terms, the broad contours of its themes on a multi-year basis, this would enable the Secretariat to be better prepared for the discussion in the Council and would facilitate input from the functional commissions and specialized agencies.

IV. Participation of the organizations of the United Nations system in the work of the Council

32. The second objective of subprogramme 28.1 is to facilitate and promote greater cooperation and collaboration among the organizations of the United Nations system active in the economic and social areas (para. 28.6 (b)). As set out in Articles 63 and 64 of the Charter, a function of the Council is to coordinate the efforts of the organizations of the United Nations system on matters falling within its competence. An important element of this is to have the organizations of the system participate actively in the Council's work.

33. Over the period under review, there has been a steady increase in the active participation of the organizations of the United Nations system at senior levels in the work of the Council, as shown in table 4. Of particular significance is the participation of senior officials in the preparatory activities for the high-level segment that helps pave the way for agreements at the session itself. The Division has worked to encourage organizations of the system to participate at a high level, including by inviting them to participate in and organize panels. *One important component of the operational activities segment has been the dialogue between Council delegations and the executive heads of the United Nations funds and programmes and with representatives of country teams (resident coordinator system).*

Table 4
Participation of senior managers of the organizations of the United Nations system in the work of the Economic and Social Council, by activity and year

Activity/participation level	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Panels in advance of the high-level segment					
Secretary-General or head of agency	-	-	1	-	6
Senior manager in the United Nations or specialized agency	-	-	2	7	17
High-level segment					
Secretary-General or head of agency	2	2	4	6	9
Senior manager in the United Nations or specialized agency	2	3	9	8	14

34. In addition to facilitating high-level participation by the organizations of the United Nations system, an objective was to assist in the development of common positions by departments within the United Nations and by the organizations of the United Nations system. The evaluation showed that this objective had been achieved during the period.

V. Common policy and procedural structure for operational activities

35. The third objective of subprogramme 28.1 is to promote and strengthen coherence and restructuring within the United Nations system in the area of operational activities for development, to improve the efficiency and effectiveness, coherence and coordination of operational activities of the system at the country level and to encourage integration with national efforts at the request of the recipient Governments (para. 28.6 (d)).

36. The Council has the responsibility for oversight of the intergovernmental bodies concerned with management of operational activities of the United Nations system. In its operational segment, policy issues are highlighted. As noted previously, a main basis for discussion is the reports on the triennial policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, which are prepared, in consultation with United Nations organizations, by the Division. *During the triennial comprehensive policy review at the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly, most delegations expressed their appreciation that the Division's report reflected the observations and comments made during the substantive session of the Council in July 2001. Based on the Division's analysis, a measure of its success is the fact that 70 per cent of the recommendations included in reports to the General Assembly in 2001 (A/56/320 and Add.1, and A/56/70-E/2001/58 and Add.1 and 2) were incorporated in General Assembly resolution 56/201 on triennial policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations.* During the period under evaluation, the Division initiated *11 specific policy reviews, including studies on capacity-building and poverty eradication in 1999 and studies for funding operational activities for development in the United Nations system and*

simplification and harmonization of programming, operational and administrative procedures in 2000.

37. In addition to facilitating decision-making at the intergovernmental level on operational matters, the Division also seeks to ensure that the decisions taken by the intergovernmental bodies are incorporated into the operating procedures of the operational organizations. All of the funds and programmes of the United Nations are required to report on the incorporation of recommendations into their work. In the case of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), this is done in a report of the Executive Director. The view of those interviewed was that this occurred regularly.

38. One aspect of the substantive support in operational activities is to enable the Council and the General Assembly to discuss policies and procedures that will more adequately meet the needs of global development. The Division's work has allowed the system to raise issues and make proposals to the Governments through the reports submitted to the Council and the General Assembly that can inform the development of new approaches to the operational activities of the system. The Division could provide even more focused support to the operational segment if the General Assembly or the Council could specify well in advance specific themes for the segment for the years between the triennial reviews. *It should be noted that in its resolution 1998/42 the Council requested the Secretary-General, when finalizing the triennial policy review, to make recommendations on the possible themes that could be discussed at the meetings of the Council's operational segment, taking into account the necessary preparatory work for the following triennial policy review.* In contrast to the high-level and coordinating segments, the triennial time frame of the operational segment provides opportunities to conduct analytical studies on issues affecting operational activities.

VI. Mobilization of non-governmental organizations to participate in the work of the Council

39. The fourth objective of subprogramme 28.1 is to increase the Organization's capacity to serve as a focal point for the non-governmental organizations with consultative status with the Economic and Social Council and to improve coordination of activities of non-governmental organizations so as to avoid duplication and ensure complementarity and to enhance opportunities to facilitate participation of the relevant elements of civil society (para. 28.6 (c)).

40. This objective is implemented by the Non-Governmental Organization Section within the Policy Coordination Branch, whose major responsibilities are: (a) to serve as the substantive secretariat of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations, which includes the processing of applications from non-governmental organizations and the preparation of all required documentation for Committee meetings; and (b) acting as the focal point within the Secretariat responsible for providing advice on matters related to non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Council.

A. Increased workload and backlog

41. There was a dramatic increase in the workload of the Section during the 1990s because of: (a) the large number of non-governmental organizations that participated in the major conferences in the 1990s and subsequently sought consultative status to follow up on the work of the conferences; and (b) Council resolution 1996/31, by which, for the first time, the Council admitted into consultative status national-level non-governmental organizations. Stimulated, in part, by the higher priority placed by the Secretary-General on a partnership with civil society and greater outreach efforts, the number of applications and letters of intent has tripled from 320 to 1,000 over the past two bienniums (1998-1999 to 2000-2001) and the total number of non-governmental organizations in consultative status — which includes three categories: general, special and roster status — has doubled over the past five years (from 1,041 in 1996 to 2,094 in 2001).

42. Since 1996, the Council has expressed in various resolutions concerns about the increased workload of the Section and has requested analysis of the problem and adequate secretariat support (resolutions 1996/31, 1997/58 and 1999/34). In response to these resolutions, the staff of the Section was increased from 9 (5 Professional and 4 General Service) in 1998-1999 to 12 posts (1 D-1, 5 Professional and 6 General Service) in the current biennium, 2002-2003. The use of volunteer services on a regular basis has also increased during this period. In addition, to cope with the workload, the time allocated to the deliberations by the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations was increased from three weeks in 1996 to five weeks in 2000-2001.

43. Despite the fact that more than half the time of the Professional staff is devoted to the review and processing of non-governmental organization applications, since 1998, the number of applications processed by the Committee has declined (from 246 in 1998 to 89 in 2000), and the number of deferrals has increased (from 41 in 1998 to 159 in 2000). The Section reported that its current backlog was 500. The Committee's Secretary attributed the declining output to an increase in processing time as each application is reviewed more thoroughly by both the Section and the Committee. Some delegations, on the other hand, attributed the declining output to the fact that applications were being deferred on substantive grounds. OIOS was informed that the Committee had considered the following proposals to control the backlog: (a) assigning a high priority to processing the backlog; (b) establishing a processing fee; and (c) imposing a ceiling on the number of applications accepted each year by the Section.

44. The number of quadrennial reports prepared by non-governmental organizations in general and special status on their activities every four years reviewed by the Committee was: 169 in 1997, 4 in 1998, 196 in 1999 and 172 during the first part of the 2001 session. While the Section is not formally responsible for monitoring non-governmental organizations in roster status, it has taken the initiative to review the contribution of those organizations to the work of the United Nations or other bodies. Failure to submit a detailed report on its activities is the most frequently cited reason for withdrawing the consultative status of organizations. In the past decade, some 28 organizations have experienced withdrawal or suspension of their consultative status for that reason. At the present time, the Section does not rely on other sources of information besides those

provided by the non-governmental organization, such as information on the organization's participation in the work of the functional commissions.

45. New guidelines for the preparation of applications and quadrennial reports were completed in 1999 and draft guidelines for special reports were being readied for presentation to the Committee at its resumed session of 2001. The effect of those guidelines on the quality of the applications and on the review process would have to be assessed at a later time.

B. Enhancing representation and participation of non-governmental organizations

46. The Section's outreach programme was effective in achieving a more balanced representation of non-governmental organizations as requested by the Council in its resolution 1996/3. In particular, the Section has adopted the practice of offering workshops to groups of regional non-governmental organizations on how to apply for consultative status with the Council and how to make optimal use of such status once granted at major conferences. The participation of representatives of non-governmental organizations was also facilitated by the financial support offered by entities such as the Non-Governmental Liaison Service. As illustrated by the two charts below, a more balanced representation was achieved in 2001, compared with 1996.

47. The Division for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination has encouraged enhanced participation by non-governmental organizations in Council meetings. For the first time, in 1999, the Council invited the participation of non-governmental organizations in the high-level segment. The contribution of the non-governmental organizations was taken into account in the manifesto adopted by the Council in 1999. In 2000 and 2001, non-governmental organizations were once again invited to take part in the ministerial-level deliberations and their contributions were reflected in the report of the Council. Past experience suggests that the value of the non-governmental organizations' inputs into the Council's high-level segment might be greatly enhanced if the organizations were to be involved at an early stage in development of the meeting's conceptual approach and its proposed theme. Non-governmental organizations have also expressed an interest in assuming a more active role in the follow-up to the high-level segment and the implementation of recommended action.

48. The Section has also promoted the formation of informal regional networks as a means of drawing small and isolated organizations into a system that provides information and support and the opportunity for collaborative action. It is envisaged that through these regional networks, a diverse, grass-roots-level experience will contribute to the substantive debates of the Council. Three regional network meetings have been held in Japan (2000), Brazil (2001) and Tunisia (2002).

NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC

49. Government representatives have publicly expressed great satisfaction with the support provided by the Secretariat and have praised its leadership for taking new initiatives in improving the support to the Committee and to non-governmental organizations, particularly the formation of regional networks. Most delegations think that support to the Committee could be improved if the financial and human resources of the Section were further strengthened. Other suggestions for improvement included: more efficient utilization of meeting services by starting on time and by developing a daily schedule of work during the informal meetings preceding the beginning of the session, advising non-governmental organizations of the day when their application would be considered and, with respect to deferred applications, limiting the discussion to previously asked questions and refraining from going back to the original application. One delegation also mentioned the need for clearer and more authoritative procedural advice, which is provided by the technical secretariat, which falls under the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services. One non-governmental organization noted that the application of new technology and more service-oriented staff could contribute to more efficient operations. Both delegations and non-governmental organizations noted the valuable work performed by an informal working group of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations, which meets throughout the year to improve the working methods of the Committee.

VII. Conclusions and recommendations

50. The Division for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination achieved most of its objectives during the period under consideration. In partnership with the Bureau of the Economic and Social Council, the Division's work led to a marked improvement in the functioning of the Council in many of its main functions. A reasonable proportion of the Secretariat's recommendations were incorporated into final decisions of the Council and the Division provided requested assistance in the negotiation process. The Division also facilitated innovation in the work of the Council through the introduction of panels and by holding a joint meeting between the Council and the Bretton Woods institutions. There was an increase in the number and level of government participants in the high-level segment and an increase in the number and level of participants from the United Nations system in the work of the Council. The Council has been largely successful in performing its function of acting as a bridge between the Council and the funds and programmes on operational issues and has initiated an outreach programme on the work of the Council. With respect to mobilizing non-governmental organizations to participate in the work of the Council, the Division worked to enhance the efficiency of the review process by increasing the quality of the applications; developed training workshops, which were presented in the regions and at major conferences; promoted regional networks to strengthen communication and coordination among non-governmental organizations; and achieved greater balance in the representation of non-governmental organizations from developing countries.

51. The substantive work of the Council is determined by the themes it selects for its high-level and coordination segments. The fact that Secretariat proposals have not been accepted in half of the years suggests that there is a lack of precise criteria that could be employed by the Secretariat when proposing and adopting themes for the segments.

52. **A major innovation has been the development of an increasingly structured preparatory process for the high-level and coordination segments of the Council. Based on the analysis of the most successful segments, however, it is clear that further improvements in the preparatory process can be made that would enable the segments to be even more effective. Furthermore, taking into account that the main session of the Council is held at Geneva every second year, there is a need to involve the Geneva delegations in the preparatory process.**

53. **As noted in paragraph 30 above, the Council session is at the apex of a series of sessions of functional commissions. While the functional commissions follow up the themes considered by the Council, they do not contribute to their preparation, even though in many cases their substantive responsibilities would seem to give them an important role, because most of the functional commissions work on the basis of multi-year work programmes, while the Council usually selects its theme only a year in advance. If it were possible for the Council to specify, in general terms, the broad contours of its themes on a multi-year basis, this would: (a) facilitate inputs from the functional commissions and specialized agencies; (b) allow longer-term planning of preparations, including an increasing use of expert groups and a mobilization of the policy research potential not only of the Division for Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination, the other divisions of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, but also of the agencies of the United Nations system; and (c) allow the non-governmental organizations to focus more effectively their preparations for participation in sessions of the Council.**

54. **The large number of operational entities involved** *and their location* **makes it difficult to organize complex policy issues relating to operational activities quickly.** *In line with a 1998 Council resolution (see para. 38 above),* **to the extent that Member States could provide specific guidance on the policy issues that they would like to review, the Division's efforts to work with the funds and programmes and the relevant organizations of the system during the two intervening years of the triennial review would be facilitated.** *Strengthening inter-agency relationships through inter-agency mechanisms could also improve the quality of policy analysis on operational activities.*

55. **The work of the Council is structured around a single substantive session meeting intensively for a relatively short period. This was largely due to the assumption that the main function of the Council was to review the work of its subsidiaries and therefore sessions had to be held after the conclusion of the sessions of the subsidiaries. With the exception of the general and the operational segments, this is not a necessity. The result of the Secretariat work is also affected by whether the session is held in New York or Geneva. While the preparatory process always takes place in New York, only half of the sessions do. It is clear that some issues are more effectively discussed in Geneva, especially when they deal with issues of concern to the specialized agencies headquartered in Europe, while other issues are more effectively discussed in New York. Suggestions have been made by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly and the Council in his report on the restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields (A/56/77-E/2001/69) to consider alternative means of structuring the work of the Council by holding the different segments at different times. In addition to spreading out the workload, this would have the effect of allowing one segment**

to feed more effectively into others. It would also reduce the difficulty faced by delegations of having to undertake complex parallel negotiations during the short substantive session. It should be possible to hold the high-level segment at a time when its results could feed into other intergovernmental discussions.

56. **Implicit in the work of the Division is improving the outreach of the Council both to make it more visible and to ensure that the results of its work can be accessed and applied at the national level and in other forums. The most developed part of the current innovations in outreach is the web site of the Economic and Social Council. This could be improved if it were more user-friendly and oriented to an audience that is interested in the issues rather than in the workings of the Council.**

57. **The following recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the Division of Economic and Social Council Support and Coordination are based on the findings presented in part one of the report:**

Recommendation 1
Make the preparatory process for the segments of the Economic and Social Council more deliberative and more reflective

(a) In collaboration with members of the Bureau of the Council, the Division should prepare proposals of precise criteria to guide the selection of themes for the different segments of the Council that would reflect the comparative advantage held by the Council over its subsidiary bodies and other bodies of the United Nations and request the Secretariat to apply them in suggesting themes for consideration (see paras. 9-12);

(b) The preparations for high-level, coordination and operational segments should make use, especially when a theme is new and emerging or is one on which there has been limited prior consideration in intergovernmental forums, of expert groups and seminars of a duration that would permit the adoption of recommendations. The results of all panels and briefings related to any segment should be summarized and made available to the Council as official documents. Other units in the Secretariat with expertise in the matter should be involved in the preparation of the reports and the principal theme documents should be prepared by the Division (see paras. 8, 13-16 and 21);

(c) The Division should make proposals to the Bureau of the Council that the subjects of the joint meetings with the Bretton Woods institutions should be more closely related to the themes being taken up by the Council in its segments and its outcomes should be included in the documentation prepared in advance by the Secretariat. An effort should be made to reach an agreement to adopt an outcome document following the joint meeting (see paras. 18, 19 and 21);

(d) When the Council session is planned to be held at Geneva, the Division should make an effort to involve those delegations and agencies utilizing new communication techniques like teleconferencing (see paras. 10, 12 and 52).

Recommendation 2
Introduce longer-term planning in the work of the Council and establish better linkages with the functional commissions

In order to facilitate inputs by the functional commissions and enhance the ability of the Secretariat to prepare policy analysis to facilitate discussions, the Secretariat should suggest to the Council that it considers establishing an indicative multi-year work programme that could be further refined in the light of developments (see paras. 29-31 and 53).

Recommendation 3
Improve the timeliness of documentation

The technical secretariat of the Council, which falls under the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, in consultation with the Division should provide updated forecasts to the Bureau of the Council regarding the availability of documentation from various departments for all the segments (see paras. 26-28).

Recommendation 4
Make the role of the Division more effective as a bridge between the organizations of the United Nations system and the General Assembly and the Council on operational issues

The Secretariat should recommend to the Second Committee of the General Assembly that, in reviewing the triennial report on operational activities, it could indicate those operational policy areas on which it wishes the Council to concentrate during the intervening two years (see paras. 38 and 54).

Recommendation 5
Reconsider the schedule of segment meetings of the Council

In order to facilitate the negotiation process on single themes and to spread out the workload over a longer period of time, the Secretariat, in consultation with the Bureau of the Council, other substantive departments, agencies and the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, should prepare a proposal for the Council to consider rescheduling its segments at different parts of the year, so that delegations can focus on negotiating agreements on single themes (see para. 55).

Recommendation 6
Make the work of the Council more visible and accessible

(a) In view of its importance for the Division's work in enhancing the outreach of the Council, the Division should propose revisions to the medium-term plan to include an outreach objective and expected achievements (see paras. 22 and 56);

(b) The Division should redesign the web site of the Council to emphasize the issues with which it has dealt and will deal. The sit should be updated frequently and new developments posted as they happen (see paras. 22, 23 and 56).

Recommendation 7
Reduce the backlog of applications of non-governmental organizations and quadrennial reports

(a) The Division should develop a strategy to eliminate the backlog of non-governmental organization applications awaiting review and quadrennial

reports processing. This should include an analysis of its causes, the use of new technology and proposing to the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations new means to control the volume of incoming applications, such as establishing a ceiling on the number of applications accepted every year (see paras. 42-44);

(b) The Secretariat should make suggestions to enhance the efficiency and working methods of the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations, such as developing a daily schedule of work prior to the beginning of the session, advising non-governmental organizations of the date when their applications will be considered and, with respect to deferred applications, limiting the discussion to previously asked questions (see para. 49).

Part two
General Assembly and Economic and Social Council affairs

VIII. Background

58. Based on the medium-term plan for 1998-2001, as revised (A/53/6/Rev.1), the objectives of subprogramme 27.1 include: (a) the provision of authoritative advice and technical secretariat services for the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and their subsidiary bodies; (b) the preparation of analytical studies on rules of procedures and practice of Assembly and the Council, studies for inclusion in *Repertory of Practice of United Nations organs* and assignment of responsibilities for implementing Assembly and Council resolutions and decisions; and (c) coordinating the preparation of necessary parliamentary documentation of the Assembly and the Council and some of their subsidiary bodies and its timely issuance in accordance with the programme of work and schedule of those bodies (ibid., paras. 27.5-27.12).

59. As the present report focuses on secretariat support to intergovernmental bodies in the social and economic areas, the relevant work of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council Affairs Division carried out by the General Assembly Servicing and the Economic and Social Council Servicing Branches is discussed in greater detail in part two. The third unit in the Division — the Disarmament and Decolonization Organs Servicing Branch — is included in statistical tables for comparison purposes. The General Assembly Affairs Servicing Branch, which services the plenary of the General Assembly, the President of the General Assembly and the General Committee, is included in the analysis because the plenary deals directly with certain social and economic matters that have not been assigned to the Second and Third Committees and makes final decisions on recommendations made by those two Main Committees.

60. OIOS conducted an inspection of the consolidation of technical support services in the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services and issued a report on 23 February 2001 (A/55/803). The report found that the consolidation of technical secretariat in one department had enhanced the efficiency of services provided to Member States and had led to improvements in: (a) planning in the allocation of services and facilities; (b) scheduling of meetings; and (c) document processing. The present report follows up on implementation of some of the recommendations of the inspection report relevant to subprogramme 27.1.

IX. Provision of technical secretariat services

61. The major function of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council Affairs Division is to provide technical secretariat services derived from the objectives of the medium-term plan mentioned in paragraph 58 above. The two branches of the Division that are the focus of the study (General Assembly Servicing and Economic and Social Council Servicing Branches) provide technical services for the General Assembly, the Second and Third Committees, the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies — regular, special and emergency special sessions — and the major conferences. They have the additional responsibility for organizing elections to membership in principal organs, subsidiary organs and other bodies. In addition, the branches prepare analytical studies at the request of intergovernmental bodies.

62. In contrast to these arrangements for technical servicing, the arrangements for providing substantive servicing to the intergovernmental bodies are less structured and more dispersed among a large number of substantive departments whose major responsibility is to draft the reports mandated by the various intergovernmental bodies and provide assistance during the negotiations on resolutions and decisions. For example, substantive support to the Third Committee is usually provided by the organizational entities most concerned with the subject covered by each agenda item: the Division for Social Policy and Development, the Division for the Advancement of Women, the Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. At the request of the Presidents of the General Assembly and the Council and the chairpersons of intergovernmental bodies, substantive departments may assist the bureaux and provide advice on drafting resolutions. The specific responsibilities of substantive secretariats in providing such assistance have been clarified in a note by the Secretary-General (E/2001/INF/3).

A. Support to the plenary and the Second and Third Committees of the General Assembly

63. Support to the General Assembly and the Main Committees must be assessed against the backdrop of resolutions 47/233, 48/264 and 55/285 aimed at revitalizing the work of the General Assembly. The views and experience of the Presidents of the General Assembly at its forty-ninth, fiftieth and fifty-first sessions were included in a progress report on the revitalization of the General Assembly requested in its resolution 48/264 (A/52/856, para. 4).

64. On 7 September 2001, in resolution 55/285, the General Assembly recommended that the rationalization and streamlining of agenda items of the General Assembly should continue in order to enable the Assembly to focus its work on priority issues. It recommended the following: (a) the clustering of all cooperation items under one item entitled "Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and other organizations" and individual cooperation items would become sub-items of that item; (b) the biennialization of several items, including the one on cooperation; (c) that the secretariat of the Assembly, in consultation with the substantive departments of the Secretariat, should look for synergies and integration of reports; (d) adequate support should be made available to the Office of the

President in substantive areas of its work; (e) the need to enhance the use of modern and information technology within the United Nations, including in the process of negotiations within the Organization; and (f) request for proposals on introducing a system to read paper ballots electronically.

65. Several interviews were conducted with the Office of the President of the General Assembly for the fifty-fifth and fifty-sixth sessions. The first interview conducted by the OIOS inspection team in 2000 indicated that the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services had provided excellent and prompt technical support, organizational meetings were constructive and the secretariats had taken initiative in foreseeing problems but that improvements in servicing the President's office could be effected, for example, in providing the office with core Professional staff who could provide continuity in the proper substantive and technical servicing of the office (A/55/803, para. 37). During the second interview, at the end of 2001, conducted in preparation for the present report, the OIOS evaluation team was informed that while there was satisfaction with the assistance and advice provided on the day-to-day conduct of meetings, the performance of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council Affairs Division was found wanting in suggesting solutions and supporting the President's efforts to streamline and restructure the agenda of work of the Assembly — a priority of the President at the fifty-fifth session. It was also mentioned that implementation of Assembly resolutions on the need for new technology was lagging. The Division was perceived more as a defender of traditions and past practices than as a catalyst for change and innovation. The interview clarified that the intent behind paragraph 22 of the annex to resolution 55/285 requesting "adequate support" for the office of the President was to obtain two additional Professional staff members who could provide substantive support, continuity and coordination with substantive departments. OIOS was informed that this provision of resolution 55/285 was the subject of further consultation among Member States.

66. During a subsequent interview with the office of the President of the General Assembly at the fifty-sixth session, the evaluation team was informed that implementation of clustering the agenda items on cooperation had resulted in efficiencies. In order to facilitate access to the office of the President and the General Committee, the office of the President recommended that the name of the President of the General Assembly and the composition of the General Committee be included in the annex to the publication *Permanent Missions to the United Nations*, which is issued by the Executive Office of the Secretary-General.

67. The results of a survey of Member States administered by the OIOS inspection team in February 2001 (see para. 60 above) indicated that 98 per cent of respondents were either "fully satisfied" or "satisfied" with the technical support services provided by the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services to the General Assembly plenary. Ratings by Member States on technical secretariat services provided to the plenary and Main Committees are presented in table 5 below. An analysis of the open-ended comments provided by the Member States in the same OIOS inspection indicated that the most frequently mentioned concerns were the following: (a) timely submission of parliamentary documentation (discussed below); (b) the quality of translation; and (c) technology and computer support for drafting resolutions.

Table 5
Rating of technical support services by delegations attending meetings of the General Assembly (survey 2000)

(Percentages)

	Plenary	*First Committee*	*Second Committee*	*Third Committee*	*Fourth Committee*
Fully satisfied	30	30	27	29	25
Satisfied	68	58	64	68	61
Fairly satisfied	2	12	9	3	14
Not satisfied	0	0	0	0	0

Source: A/55/803, annex I.

68. In-depth interviews conducted with bureau members of the Second and Third Committees further confirmed satisfaction with the level of services provided. In particular, Third Committee bureau members were most satisfied with the Secretary's organizational skills and her responsiveness in providing information to bureau members and scheduling informal meetings. They noted however, that the timeliness of support in drafting texts and proposals for action by the Committee ought to be improved. The Secretariat's most helpful contribution to the Second Committee was in the arrangements for "informal informals" (up to 16 meetings per day) and for posting the information in the *Journal of the United Nations*. As most resolutions in the Second Committee are adopted by consensus and rarely by a vote, informal consultations are considered to be very important instruments that allow delegations to find common consensus. Action is taken by the Committee when there are a number of texts from the vice-chairperson that are ready for adoption and delegations are alerted by the Secretary well in advance.

69. The Secretaries of the Second and Third Committees considered that the primary responsibility for implementing General Assembly resolutions concerning streamlining the work of the Committees rested with delegations. However, they recognized that they had a responsibility to remind delegations of the need to exercise discipline in requesting new reports and to try to identify and limit deviations from the established biennial and triennial programme of work. They also focused their attention on the financial implications of resolutions and the requests for reports contained therein and sent immediately all draft resolutions to the substantive departments and to the Budget Division for their views.

70. In order to ensure a smooth functioning of the Committees, it is essential that the technical secretariat and substantive departments cooperate and coordinate closely with respect to the following: (a) planning the programme of work and the number of meetings required; (b) determining dates of submission of documents that are essential to the consideration of the agenda items; and (c) determining dates when the item relating to the work of a particular department will be discussed and when the assistance of a substantive department will be needed for drafting a resolution at the chair's request.

B. Support to the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies

71. Apart from servicing the Second and Third Committees, the Economic and S ial Council Servicing Branch of the Division provides technical services to the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies that meet at Headquarters, ad hoc bodies and special conferences dealing with economic, social and related matters. It should be noted that the planning, forecasting, editing and monitoring of documentation in the economic, social and related fields are undertaken by the Documentation Programming and Monitoring Unit, while the analysis of resolutions and decisions and coordinating assignment of responsibility for Economic and Social Council resolutions and decisions is the responsibility of the Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs. This document is usually issued during the first week of March of the following year, some seven months after the end of the substantive session of the Council. This gap, which may delay the preparation of documents, could not be fully justified.

72. Three Bureau members of the Council whose assessment of the work of the technical secretariat was requested expressed positive views: all three agreed that servicing was efficient, prompt and fast. One Bureau member stated that the Secretariat had been proactive and responsive and the documentation was on time while another stated that the planning of meetings could be improved through better communication with the Bureau, including information on the status of documentation. As was noted in part one of the present report (para. 27 and table 3), a study of the reports on the status of documentation presented to the Council showed that for most years the documentation was issued prior to the substantive session, although a small proportion was issued prior to the six weeks deadline.

73. The evaluation team noted the existence of a manual prepared by the Economic and Social Council Servicing Branch in 1997 for the secretaries of the committees and bodies of the United Nations in the economic and social field. The manual addresses the concerns raised in the OIOS 2001 report which recommended that the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services prepare operational guidelines for its respective areas of work to safeguard institutional memory and for the sake of efficient management. The manual has been useful to the Economic and Social Council Servicing Branch staff. No similar document for the other branches of the Division exists. Regarding the work of the Fourth Committee and the technical secretariat's servicing of the Committee, a Bureau member suggested that briefings on background information should be organized for the Committee at the beginning of each session and that a manual describing practices and precedents on rules of procedures be drafted to serve as reference to future bureaux and secretaries.

C. Utilization of conference servicing resources by the plenary and Main Committees of the General Assembly

74. While it is recognized that bureaux and delegations have an influence on the efficient use of meeting resources, the role of the technical secretariat in ensuring that meeting services are efficiently utilized is undeniable. In that connection, meeting statistics on utilization and planning accuracy factors can provide a partial

indicator of the performance of the technical secretariats. These measures of efficiency are regularly reviewed by the Committee on Conferences. There is a utilization benchmark of 80 per cent, but there is no benchmark for the planning accuracy factor. The Chair of the Committee on Conferences holds meetings with the chair of committees who have consistently — for the past three years — fallen below the utilization factor. The chair of other committees who have not met the benchmark one year or one session receives letters. All secretariats are requested to bring utilization statistics to the attention of their bureaux and committees at large. Table 6 contains meeting statistics of the plenary and the Main Committees of the General Assembly serviced by the Bureau for the fifty-first and fifty-fifth sessions. It indicates that the utilization factor of the Main Committees at the fifty-fifth session was below the benchmark and was lower than at the fifty-first session. With the exception of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee), the planning accuracy factor had also declined for the Main Committees and for the plenary over this period. Therefore, the technical secretariat should work closely with the bureaux of their respective committee to improve meeting resources' utilization.

Table 6
Meeting statistics for the plenary and Main Committees of the General Assembly

Intergovernmental bodies	*Planning accuracy factor*[a]	*Utilization factor*[b]
General Assembly, Plenary		
Fifty-fifth session	49	87
Fifty-first session	68	80
First Committee		
Fifty-fifth session	62	73
Fifty-first session	82	82
Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee)		
Fifty-fifth session	59	62
Fifty-first session	53	76
Second Committee		
Fifty-fifth session	62	73
Fifty-first session	80	82
Third Committee		
Fifty-fifth session	75	66
Fifty-first session	89	81
Sixth Committee		
Fifty-fifth session	86	78
Fifty-first session	83	93

Source: A/AC.172/2001/3 and A/AC.172/1997/3.

[a] Calculated as meetings planned, minus additional meetings, minus cancellations, all as a percentage of meetings planned.

[b] Percentage of available conference resources actually used by the organ in question.

X. Timely submission of parliamentary documentation

75. The General Assembly Servicing Branch is responsible for the preparation of pre-session parliamentary documentation such as the preliminary list of agenda items, provisional and final agendas, the supplementary list of items, and the memorandum of the Secretary-General on the organization of work of the Assembly. The three servicing Branches in the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council Affairs Division are responsible for the duly authorized submission of draft resolutions and decisions adopted by the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and their subsidiary bodies. While the substantive departments are responsible for the preparation of substantive pre-session documentation, the Division is responsible for coordinating the submission of these documents.

76. Late issuance of parliamentary documentation, in particular pre-session documents, is a long-standing issue that the General Assembly has pressed for ways to resolve. In its resolution 47/202, the Assembly urged the substantive departments to comply with the rule requiring submission of pre-session documents to the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services at least 10 weeks before sessions in order to allow adequate time for processing in all languages. For the past five sessions the General Assembly has adopted various resolutions dealing with related issues. In paragraph 4 of section III of its resolution 55/222, the General Assembly invited intergovernmental bodies, before the commencement of the substantive work, to review with author departments the question of availability of documentation for the proper functioning of those bodies and to report thereon to the Assembly at its fifty-sixth session through the Committee on Conferences. In response, the Chairman of the Committee on Conferences sent a letter to the chairpersons of intergovernmental bodies and an interim report of the Secretary-General, including summaries of the replies received, was issued. For example, the chairpersons of the Second and Third Committees stated that before each session, reports on the status of documentation were circulated and taken into account when preparing the organization of work (see A/56/299, annex II).

A. Improvements in monitoring and accountability

77. The 2001 OIOS report (see para. 60 above) found that while the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services had made efforts to improve the situation through rationalizing the scheduling of meetings of intergovernmental bodies and the creation of the new Documentation Programming and Monitoring Unit, the author departments by submitting their reports after the deadline bore the major responsibility for the delays in issuing the documentation. The Unit convenes "plenary" focal point meetings two or three times a year to reiterate the requirements outlined by the General Assembly (A/55/803, para. 14). The OIOS report recommended that the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services should initiate in the senior management group a discussion on the need for departments to enforce compliance with document submission requirements, underscoring the cost to the Secretariat and Member States of delayed documentation (A/55/803, para. 65). As a follow-up to this recommendation, the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services sent a letter in early 2001 to the Secretary of the senior management group to include this topic in the agenda of the group. In early 2002,

this topic had not yet been incorporated. As an additional step, the Under-Secretary-General sent a letter to all heads of departments, funds and programmes reminding them of the documents submission requirements.

78. In response to resolution 54/248, in which the General Assembly stated that if a report was submitted late to conference services, the reasons therefore should be included in a footnote to the document, the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services in a memorandum dated 27 January 2000, reminded the focal points of author departments of the importance of implementing that instruction for documents submitted during the fifty-fifth session (see A/55/803, para. 15). However, compliance has been less than satisfactory, as approximately half of the late submissions did not carry footnotes provided by the author departments (see A/56/300, para. 7). Among the reasons given for late submission were the need to include more up-to-date information or developments, the need for lengthy consultations before preparation of reports, late receipt of inputs from Member States and/or other departments/agencies and the fact that events reported on were scheduled too close to the session of the General Assembly (ibid., para. 8). As table 7 indicates, the timeliness of submission has declined for General Assembly documents. OIOS noted that the Documentation Programming and Monitoring Unit felt that it did not have the authority to ensure departments' compliance with the above resolutions on the need for footnotes explaining delays in submission of documentation. However, the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services should make further effort to ensure compliance, as this information would assist the Department in analysing, in consultation with the author departments, the deep causes of the delays as recommended by the Committee on Conferences.

Table 7
Timeliness of submission of General Assembly documents, 1999-2001

	1999	*2000*	*2001*
General Assembly documents			
Percentage late	68	83	71
Average lateness (days)	60	65	74

Source: Documentation Programming and Monitoring Unit statistics.

79. Internal monthly statistics provided by the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services for the past four years on the submission and issuance of pages of documents tend to support the Department's contention that its processing of documents is keeping pace with their submission. However, as the Department was unable to provide statistics on throughput time for the 20 per cent of documents that were submitted in timely fashion, OIOS was unable to determine the frequency of delays caused by the internal processing. *In its comments to an earlier draft of this report, the Department stated that delays in issuing timely submission are scheduling decisions made on the basis of more pressing priorities and that the Department is not to blame for these.*

B. Other proposals of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services for improving timeliness

80. Over the past three bienniums, the Department has submitted various proposals for consideration by the Committee on Conferences and the General Assembly aimed at improving the timeliness of issuance of parliamentary documentation. One of the earlier proposals was to change the six-week rule itself, which would have allowed the submission of documents for processing on a staggered basis (A/49/531).

81. At the fifty-sixth session, the Department resubmitted proposals which it had submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-fifth session (A/AC.172/2000/6 and A/56/300). These included: (a) late submission could be processed by rescheduling the processing of other documents submitted by that same body in order to minimize the negative impact of late submission by an author department on the work of other organs; (b) intergovernmental organs should review their reporting cycles with a view either to changing their reporting period in order to allow for adequate time for the drafting of their report or to introducing periodicity in the form of quarterly or bi-annual instead of annual reports; (c) author substantive departments should be authorized to prepare reports with an earlier cut-off date, with the possibility of including additional information, if necessary, in addenda to the parent document; and (d) servicing secretariats and bureaux of intergovernmental bodies should adjust their programme of work by delaying or postponing consideration of related items or documents, a practice which is already followed by some bodies. *In resolution 56/242*, the General Assembly approved the above proposals with the exception of (d) on adjusting the programme of work. The evaluation team believes that the Department should review the implications of these proposals for the intergovernmental bodies and substantive departments concerned and present different implementation options to these bodies and departments.

XI. Conclusions and recommendations

82. **The General Assembly and Economic and Social Council Affairs Division has performed efficiently and effectively during a period of structural transition in providing technical secretariat services to intergovernmental bodies. While some delegations support the views expressed by the Division's staff that the major responsibility for revitalizing the work of the General Assembly and the Main Committees lies with Member States, at the same time they expressed the need for a more proactive role by the Secretariat in providing advice and ideas for further streamlining the agenda of the plenary and the Main Committees, for example in providing advice on clustering similar items together and in promoting the introduction of technological innovation. Some delegations also stated the importance for technical secretaries to have a better mastery of the rules of procedure of their respective committee, which would enable them to provide more authoritative advice when the need arises.**

83. **The most recurrent complaints by bureau members of Main Committees and delegations was the late issuance of documentation, which according to them diminished their ability to deal effectively with the issues before them by**

denying them time to consult with the relevant ministries in their respective capitals. Availability of documentation is one of the key factors considered by the technical secretariat in organizing the agenda of work of the Main Committees. As stated in the present report, the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services has undertaken numerous efforts to address the problem of late submission of documentation and made thorough, innovative proposals. It established a new unit and holds regular meetings with focal points in author departments and provides regular and special reports on the status of documentation by author departments. Despite these measures, approximately two thirds of all General Assembly documents are submitted after the 10-week deadline and the average lateness is over two months. It was noted that the letter following up on Economic and Social Council resolutions and decisions is issued some seven months after the end of the substantive session in July of each year *by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs.* **This letter could be issued more expeditiously to author departments to further improve the submission of Council documentation.**

84. **The General Assembly has endorsed most of the proposals submitted by the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services to improve the timeliness of documentation and recommended that more effective systems of responsibility and accountability be developed. The Committee on Conferences has encouraged the Department to proceed with a "more extensive analysis of the reasons for late issuance of documentation".** *In its comments on an earlier draft of the present report the Department stated that the report supported the notion that the six-week rule was unrealistic and not very practical when applied across the board and that the rule should allow for greater flexibility.*

85. **The following recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the General Assembly and Economic and Social Council Affairs Division are based on the findings in part two of the present report:**

Recommendation 1
Provision of advice and support provided by technical secretariats

(a) The Division of General Assembly and Economic and Social Council Affairs should provide advice to the office of the President on how to implement provisions of General Assembly resolutions on revitalization, particularly in relation to the grouping and scheduling of agenda items and reports strengthening the office of the President and ensuring that the Department of Management develops proposals for reading paper ballots electronically (see paras. 63-65);

(b) In consultation with substantive departments, the technical secretaries of the Main Committees should submit proposals to the respective bureaux for their consideration, in which reports could be integrated and which resolutions could be biennialized (see paras. 63-65 and 69);

(c) The technical secretaries should consult with bureau members and government representatives about the need for computer support for drafting texts during negotiations and ensure that such support is made available (see paras. 67, 68 and 70);

(d) The internal manual prepared by the Economic and Social Council Servicing Branch should be updated with guidelines to cover practices and procedures that are ambiguous or may require interpretation, as needed, by the subsidiary organs of the Council; similar manuals should be developed for the other branches of the Division (see paras. 49 and 73).

Recommendation 2
Improved resource utilization

At the organizational session of their respective intergovernmental body, technical secretaries should discuss with the chairs meeting statistics for the previous session and means of improving resource utilization (see para. 74).

Recommendation 3
Improved support provided by substantive secretariats

To facilitate access to information by bureau members of intergovernmental bodies, substantive secretariats should organize briefings on key reports highlighting policy implications of analysis presented. Secretariat assistance to delegations in drafting proposals for texts at delegations' request should be provided in full compliance with the relevant rules of procedures. The practical implications regarding such assistance should be clarified at the organizational session and communicated to the relevant substantive secretariats by the technical secretariat immediately after the organizational session (see paras. 62 and 68).

Recommendation 4
Timely issuance of documentation

(a) The Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services should further explore reasons for lateness in submitting documentation by distinguishing for example between delays that are caused by the Department's dependency on the reports of other United Nations or external bodies, and those that could have been avoided through better planning of resources and accountability. In the case of the small proportion of documents that are submitted before deadlines, the Department should also be able to account for delays caused by the reshuffling of priorities or processing. The Department should formulate a plan to eliminate delays in the issuance of documentation caused by decisions that are under the control of the Secretariat (see paras. 75-81);

(b) Notification of responsibilities for implementation of recommendations should be made as expeditiously as possible at the end of each main and resumed session of the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly (see para. 71).

Recommendation 5
Review by the Committee on Conferences

The present report, and the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination thereon, should be submitted to the Committee on Conferences at its meeting in 2002.

(*Signed*) Dileep Nair
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 16* (A/55/16).

[2] Ibid., *Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 6* (A/53/6/Rev.1).

[3] Ibid., para. 28.6.

[4] Ibid., *Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 6* (A/55/6/Rev.1).

[5] The summary records for 2001 were not yet issued when the analysis was completed and have not been included for that reason.

[6] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 3* (A/55/3/Rev.1), chap. III, para. 17.

[7] Regional commissions made a formal input into the discussions of the high-level segment in 2000 on information and communication technology.